

Family Album:

A photo-media investigation of the global family

By

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This exegesis is dedicated to the memory of my father, Frits Fiedeldy (1926 – 1995), who was passionate about taking photographs and home movies of his family and in the process created a cherished archive.

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Abstract

This exegesis visually explores the changing identity of the dispersed family from post war Australia to the present. The investigation references my Dutch migrant family which has evolved into a multicultural family with links to India, Japan, Singapore and Australia.

The project has culminated in four installations about different aspects of the global family that investigate three fundamental concepts: origins, belonging and hybridity. The notion of origins denotes parentage, kinfolk and cultural heritage resulting in a sense of belonging through having family and kinship. To evoke the themes of origins and belonging, I have used personal photographs and film footage from my family's archive to explore the idea of family photo media as a symbol of familial connectedness and as a medium for staying in touch. While the works depict private moments of a shared and mutual history, the archival imagery also generates, for the viewer, the potential for a re-engagement with Australian cultural history. The notion of hybridity relates to mixed origins and cross cultural relationships in a globalized world. Contemporary photographs of my family and their diverse surroundings are entwined to suggest both difference and sameness.

The project's theoretical foundation is positioned by writers such as Roland Barthes, Annette Kuhn, Marianne Hirsch and Susan Sontag who offer a framework for photography's power to symbolically bind families. Other writers such as James Clifford, Homi Bhabha and Melissa Chui are pertinent

for their discussion of identity in an inclusive globalised world. Charles Merewether and Hal Foster have been significant for their discourse on elegiac interpretations of the archive.

The project's concern with the connectedness of the evolving dispersed family is informed by artists who make works centred on familial interaction inside a global framework, utilizing photography, archival or found film footage, family photographic albums, still and moving imagery. Elinor Carucci and Annelies Strba have been important for their ability to poetically and intimately describe family bonds. Mohindi Chandra and Fiona Tan have been influential for their works which deal with their own private cross cultural experiences. Within this context, the project has re-examined and re-imagined ideas around the shifting identity of the global family and has investigated strategies for conveying those ideas through the poetic referencing of a unique family archive and the melding of contemporary photographs of a modern dispersed family.

In summary, my project aims to engender an intimate engagement with family in a transitional and transformative state. I have investigated this through the shift of my own family from its Dutch origins into a contemporary global family with traces of diverse cultures, past and present. Ultimately, my family's story conveys the universal story of the evolving global family whose efforts to stay connected is ongoing.

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Introduction

This exegesis is divided into three main chapters and a conclusion.

Chapter one provides an overview of the central argument. It introduces the subject matter – the visual exploration of the changing identity of the globally dispersed family – and acknowledges the related field in contemporary art practice. The conceptual and formal issues associated with this field are identified. This chapter also provides an account of my dispersed family which I have used as the basis for the project, and provides a summary of the submitted work.

Chapter two examines artists and writers who provide a context for the project. The underpinning concepts of the research associated with the globally dispersed family - origins, belonging and hybridity - are explored through a discussion of relevant theorists. The chapter then discusses how these concepts have been visually explored in the work of four key artists. It also explains how this project has added to that field.

Chapter three provides a detailed account of how my investigation was pursued. It reveals the journey I undertook to visually explore the concept of the dispersed family. I explain how I have referenced my family's transformation from an Australia based migrant family with Dutch origins to a globally dispersed family with mixed origins. I discuss a number of field trips I made in Australia and overseas in order to photograph and film my family

in their diverse environments. In this chapter, I also elaborate on the ideas and various strategies undertaken to create each of the four final works.

The exegesis concludes with a summary of how the project has explored the changing identity of the global family and how those explorations have added to the field identified in chapter one.

Chapter 1: Central Argument

“Through photographs, each family constructs a portrait chronicle of itself – a portable kit of images that bears witness to its connectedness. It hardly matters what activities are photographed so long as photographs get taken and are cherished.... As that claustrophobic unit, the nuclear family was being carved out of a much larger family aggregate, photography came along to memorialize, to reaffirm symbolically, the imperilled continuity and vanishing extendedness of family life.”

(Sontag, 2000, p8)

Susan Sontag describes with eloquent precision the relationship of photography and the shifting identity of family, from extended to nuclear with dispersed relatives.

Family Album questions the possibility of visualizing the dispersed family – a family that is physically separated from one another and yet emotionally connected. This research project aims to develop a visual language for the connection and unification of the dispersed family and encompasses the visual exploration of the transition and transformation of the family as a result of global influences. The enquiry is underpinned by three fundamental concepts: origins, belonging and hybridity. The notions of origins and belonging are symbiotic. They are entwined concepts where belonging is derived from a deep understanding of origins. The Collins dictionary defines origins as ‘ancestry or parentage; birth; extraction’ (Collins dictionary 2007). The Macquarie Thesaurus refers to origins as shared genetics, blood and biology (Macquarie Thesaurus 2007). Within this context awareness of our origins implies knowing our parentage and extended clan. They are our parents,

siblings and extended family of grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. Origins also signify a mutually shared cultural heritage, rituals, customs and language. And from this profound awareness of our origins comes the security of belonging – a basic human desire to be part of a family community. And yet belonging is not exclusive to homogenous origins. It can also be associated with hybridity, which is a combination of different origins. James Clifford defines hybridity in terms of a globalized world and how it relates to mixed origins - a coming together of diverse racial and cultural backgrounds resulting in cross cultural relationships. (Clifford, 1988 p10)

To create my work, I have drawn on the experience of my dispersed family, a family that lives in different countries around the world, physically separated from one another, yet emotionally connected. I have utilized personal photographs and film footage from my family's archive and I have taken a number of field trips overseas and around Australia to photograph my family in their diverse surroundings.

My parents came to Australia in the early 1950s, as part of the flood of post war immigrants escaping a war ravaged Europe. The dominant paradigm in their new homeland was 'Assimilation' and 'White Australia' where its Indigenous people were marginalised and Asians were rejected all together. The nuclear family consisting of my father, mother, four girls and one boy was 'carved out of a much larger family aggregate' (Sontag, 2000, p8). Our way of knowing and experiencing our extended family in Holland was through photographs received in the mail.

There was a constant exchange of movies, slides and photographs between Australia and Holland. The visual interchange was one of the key ingredients for maintaining family connection. My mother and father were eager to capture the myriad of shared moments of family life, for their own album and to send to our extended family. The camera and movie camera were permanently available to seize those symbolic moments of celebration at birthday parties and Christmas. There were photographs of rites of passage, baptisms and first days at school or photographs of everyday things like hanging out in the backyard together. The camera was quietly picked up, pictures shot or movies rolled.

Our small post war Dutch migrant family has evolved into a dispersed, multicultural family that includes partners from India, Japan, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand. We stay in touch just as my parents did with their family in Holland. These days we maintain family connection through the exchange of photographs sent via email. The pictures that we barter continue to be comprised of moments of celebration, rites of passage and portraiture.

Photographs are the treasured visual trace of symbolic moments in family life. They not only represent shared celebrations or social achievements, they are also an emblem of familial connection and a charted remnant of a family's collective memory and mutual history. Usually, the situations captured are from communal cultural experiences such as candles blown out on a birthday cake, or the opening of Christmas presents. They are the times that define rites of passage such as a newborn baby welcomed into the home, a child's first day at school or a scene from a graduation day. The chronicle of events is

never-ending. Normally, family photographs are shown in sequence. The selection and ordering of the images is as relevant as the pictures themselves where the private account is set out in a linear and chronological manner.

Annette Kuhn's discussion of the cultural construction of the family through photography is pertinent to this project. Kuhn points out that the family album is the symbol of familial unification and in the process of making, categorizing and displaying a photographic album the family is defined (Kuhn, 2002, p19). Furthermore, Kuhn goes on to say that this urge to make a photograph, to document an event, to compose statements as unique events, is directly related to the aspiration of making an archive. And over time, when the family album is revisited, the memories and stories associated with the image have shifted and changed. (Kuhn, 2002, p19)

Family Album aims to contribute to a field of contemporary photo media that is concerned with exploring family life. My research focuses on the globally dispersed family. This project is informed and contextualized by artists who make works which deal with familial interaction inside a global framework and encompass artists who express their own cross cultural experiences. Elinor Carucci creates work that expresses her mother as her 'natural point of origin' for her dispersed family (Carucci, 2002, p9). Annelies Strba has created a twenty year archive of her immediate family. Mohindi Chandra's practice centres on the symbolic reunification of her dispersed Fiji Indian family. Fiona Tan explores ideas about individual identity as well as its collective expression from a cross cultural perspective. These artists

communicate their ideas through a range of different photo-media; photography, archival or found film footage, family photographic albums, still and moving imagery.

My research contributes to this field of contemporary photo-media practice and to our understanding of the family by exploring four different aspects of the contemporary global family realized in four installations.

In the works, titled *Chronicles from my Father* and *Junction: grown into me*, the themes of origins, belonging and hybridity are evoked through the use of personal photographs and film footage from my family's archive. The poetic referencing of a unique family archive offers an insight into a dispersed family with Dutch origins. At the same time the viewer is also given an opening for a potential re-engagement with Australian cultural history. In *Chronicles from my Father*, the central idea is familial connectedness witnessed through family photographs. In *Junction: grown into me* the focus is the symbolic unification of a family dispersed across two countries, using photo-media.

In the installations *Relative* and *Intersect*, the central themes of the project are evoked with contemporary photography and video. These latter works offer an insight into a modern globally dispersed family which has traces of diverse cultures, both past and present. In *Relative* the notion of mixed origins is expressed through the presentation of entwined contemporary photographs of my family and their diverse surroundings. In *Intersect*, the central idea - a familial shared history evidenced through photo-media - is evoked through a

contemporary video taken in the various environments in which my siblings live. The video is enmeshed with our old home movie.

In its entirety, the project, *Family Album* offers an intimate engagement with my family's story, a family with Dutch origins who has evolved into a global family with mixed origins. The project conveys the story of the dispersed family who are symbolically reconnected through photo-media.

Origins and belonging

Family photographs offer an awakening for private memories – a place where a real sense of belonging with kin is generated. Photographs of my early family life have been blue printed into my psychological makeup. I had grown up looking at our old black and white photographs. In many instances the images are quite possibly my memory. In other cases, only a small section of the image sparks a redolence of another time – the rest is more than likely hidden in my subconscious. And whenever I viewed photographs of my extended family, whom I had never met, I found my self scouring those images for traces of resemblance and other inherent linkages.

Roland Barthes thoughts on the family photograph's power to translate ancestry and familial connection have been significant for this project. Barthes expresses a profound sense of belonging when he views a photograph of his mother as a five year old in the winter garden of their family home. The photograph endows Barthes with a deep connection with his mother as a little

girl – a time before he was born (Barthes, 2000, p72). The image of her reaches deep into his being as he becomes conscious of his origins. Barthes describes it as a moment of self recognition and self discovery. (Barthes, 2000, p71) In the act of viewing a family photograph Barthes is participating in an entrenched family tradition where the photograph offers a genuine sanctuary for belonging through kinship.

The winter garden photograph is the only image Barthes discusses in detail that is not reproduced in *Camera Lucida*. He cannot show the photograph outside the family because he considers the image to be too intimate to share. For anyone else the image would be just another generic family photograph. (Barthes, 2000, p73) Barthes' notion of the family photograph only having relevance within the family circle reflects its absolute potency for familial belonging. The subjective nature of the family photograph also reflected a key consideration for how I would represent this project.

Susan Sontag's notion of the photograph as the symbolic presence for the dispersed family has been relevant for providing both a conceptual and formal foundation to this project. Sontag writes on the disappearing extended family and how the photograph has taken on the symbolic presence of scattered relatives.

Those ghostly traces, photographs, supply the token presence of the dispersed relatives. A family's photograph album is generally about the extended family – and, often is all that remains of it."
(Sontag 2000, p8)

As children, my siblings and I developed a strong bond with kin who only existed in the chromatic descriptions we received regularly in the mail. The visual interchange was one of the key ingredients for maintaining a family connection with kin we never met. The imagery gave us a sense of belonging and ancestry in terms of our origins. We had a deep trust that the people in the images were our family. And of course, our notion of extended family was mythologized in our imaginations by pictorial moments of celebration and stability.

Marianne Hirsch has been significant by means of her investigation into the various guises within the family photograph. Hirsch considers Jacques Lacan's ideas on familial representation. When we photograph ourselves in the domestic setting, we are not photographing in a vacuum, we are responding to dominant mythologies of family life, to conceptions we have inherited and to popular imagery in the media. These images which occupy our subconscious add to the depiction of the conventional familial picture. Moreover, each image is the result of other semblances of family members as they define themselves in relation to the roles they inhabit as father, mother, son, husband or lover. As these different guises intersect, they are filtered through the social conventions which define what and how we might see.

(Hirsch, M, 1999, p xvi)

Because family photographs are a symbol for commemorative episodes of domestic harmony and stability where familial myths and ideologies appear to be upheld – the potential to find a genuine story in those pictures can be problematic. Hirsch writes that photographs occupy the contradictory space

between the idealized myth of the family and the actual reality of family. She says that *'photographs can more easily show us what we wish our family to be, and therefore most frequently what it is not'* (Hirsch, Marianne, 1997, p8)

Hirsch considers Walter Benjamin's notion of 'unconscious optics' where the photograph exposes a complicated and otherwise invisible network of visual detail especially in relation to the family and the family picture allowing us to peruse family photographs for clues to the family's visual interactions (Hirsch, M, 1997, p10)

To find the core within a family photograph we may need to probe the image more closely through looking and asking where individuals are placed in relation to one another in a group photograph. Who is not there? Who has taken the photograph? And in retrospection, we may find ourselves combing old photographs for visual clues to provide evidence of someone's future: is there a hint in a child's facial expression that predicts a particular disposition or fate in later adulthood? And finally can we recognize something of ourselves in an image of a relative? Perhaps a relative we have never met?

Hybridity

In the 1950s and 60s I was part of a nuclear family in Australia linked with my extended family in the Netherlands through photographs. Today that post war migrant family has evolved in to a cross-culturally dispersed family. We still share imagery through email and social media. Family members live with

their partners in India, Japan, Singapore and Australia and with children who have diverse racial and cultural origins. My nieces and nephew in India have a mother with Dutch origins, who grew up in Australia, and an Indian father. My granddaughter in Singapore has a father who has both Dutch and Irish/Australian origins and a Chinese mother.

Ethnographer, James Clifford defines 'hybridity' in postmodern terms as the notion of cultures and individual identities being re made continuously through their contact with each other. He states

".....identity emerges as a complex cultural problem.....a concept that can preserve culture's differentiating functions while conceiving of collective identity as a hybrid, often discontinuous inventive process"(Clifford, 1988 p10)

Clifford's notion of hybridity is grounded in the idea of a globalized world. He proposes that authentic identity needs to be re-conceived as an ongoing creative activity in which elements of 'traditional' and 'modern' cultures collide, meld and restructure themselves into something new (Clifford, 1988, p10).

Cultural critic Homi Bhabha defines terms such as 'cultural translation', 'cultural hybridity' and 'third space' (Rutherford, 1990, p209-210). Bhabha writes that cultural translation involves a relationship between cultures. Even though cultures have their own unique qualities, they are still affected by other cultures. Bhabha describes the process of cultural translation as mischievous imitation in which the power of the original culture is challenged through measured amounts of interpretation and replication (Rutherford,

1990, P 210). Bhabha's use of the term cultural translation implies that cultural identity should not be rigidly associated with a precise origin. Identity can be shaped by diverse cultural groups. Furthermore, Bhabha argues that no culture is pure or unique in itself and that *'all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity'* (Rutherford, 1990, p 211).

Bhabha goes on to say that a cultural hybrid identity occupies a new position - both inside and outside of culture, rather than the notion of identity being formed within the equivalent effects of two or more cultures. He describes this new position as a 'third space' Bhabha writes:

'...hybridity... is 'the third space' which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority... But the importance of hybridity is that it bears the traces of those feelings and practices that inform it [without giving them] the authority of being prior in the sense of being original' (Rutherford, 1990, p 211).

The third space emerges from cultural hybridity, providing a different model for analyzing origins. Rather than the notions of cultural totality or authority determining origins, the 'third space' position examines practices that insist on maintaining impervious barriers between cultures.

(Rutherford, 1990, p 211)

The concepts of cultural hybridity and a 'third space' influence my research project because they provide a framework for understanding the hybrid cultural identity of my evolving global family - an identity constructed from the place of origin and the new place of living. Cultural identity is not

contingent upon a static and inflexible foundation. Cultural identity is negotiated and constructed from a point between cultures or rather from a position inside and outside of culture where it is subject to evolution and transformation.

The discussion of theorists' ideas has helped me to establish a framework for the project's conceptual underpinnings: origins, belonging and hybridity. The discourse on the family photograph's relationship with ancestry, kinship and familial bonds provided a structure for the visual exploration of personal, archival, and still and moving images. The notion of the photograph as symbolic for the dispersed family was relevant as I aimed to symbolically reunite my dispersed family using photo-media. The discussion of hybridity and identity in an inclusive globalised world was also significant. The notion of cultures melding, colliding and restructuring was particularly relevant to the visual exploration of the transition and transformation of the post war dispersed family to the contemporary global family.

Family Album is a visual investigation of the evolving dispersed family. The research references my family's experience. It has contributed to a field of contemporary photo-media practice concerned with familial connections through the poetic referencing of my personal archive of still and moving image and through contemporary photographs and video taken of my globally dispersed family. Ultimately, the project expresses the universal story of the evolving dispersed family affected by global influences.

Chapter 2: Context

In this research project I have referenced artists who use photographic media to portray the contemporary family, more specifically those who are concerned with representing the family either through their own captured photographs or through private or found archival imagery and where notions of origins, belonging and hybridity are explored. Throughout my exegesis, I also briefly mention other artists, who have had some influence on my project - either because of the strategies they use or because of the themes they explore. In this chapter, I focus on the four key artists who contextualize my investigation. Elinor Carucci and Annelies Strba have been important for their ability to poetically and intimately describe family through their photographs and where their central concern has been an exploration of belonging through origins. Mohindi Chandra and Fiona Tan use archival or found film footage, family photographic albums, still and moving imagery. They have been influential to my project for their works which deal with their own, private, cross cultural experiences. Chandra concentrates on the symbolic reunification of her globally dispersed family. Tan's work seamlessly interweaves narratives in a play of private introspection and its collective expression.

Several theorists also contextualize the project. As well as providing a conceptual underpinning to the project, Susan Sontag also offers a formal foundation with her discussion of photography's power to symbolically reunite the dispersed family. Melissa Chui is noteworthy for her ideas about

‘transexperience’. Charles Merewether and Hal Foster are pertinent for their discussion of contemporary art interpretations of the archive. Julia Hirsch writes that the first renderings of the modern Western family originated in Renaissance portraiture where families were represented for the first time as an autonomous unit. Early photographers embraced the prevailing rituals of portraiture painting, leading to the preservation of the traditions of family photography that still exists today. Hirsch writes that photographic images of the family continue to

‘...describe the family as a state whose ties are rooted in property; the family as a spiritual assembly which is based on moral values; and the family as a bond feeling which stems from instinct and passion’ (Hirsch, J 1981, p15)

She argues that photographic portraits continue to share the convention of family portraits in painting dating back to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. (Hirsch, Julia 1981, p15)

The representation of the modern family is more multifaceted than the bygone Renaissance family. The contemporary Western family has evolved and transformed from the nuclear unit of father, mother and children with homogenous origins - where the patriarch is the sole provider and the matriarch is the domestically based carer and nurturer - and where the extended family lives in close proximity. Today, the family constitutes an assortment of configurations, from the single parent family, to the blended step family, the same sex parent family or the multicultural family with mixed origins. It is unfeasible to picture the family unit with a standard blueprint.

Equally challenging is the visualization of the globally dispersed family – families who are emotionally connected despite being physically separated.

Sontag's idea that the photograph has taken on the symbolic presence of the dispersed family (Sontag 2000, p8) is particularly relevant to the contextual aspect of this project. Sontag's writing has been inspirational for assisting me to develop strategies to visually represent the coming together of the dispersed family through photo- media.

Belonging and origins

Mohini Chandra

Chandra is significant to my project for her use of photographs of her globally dispersed Fijian Indian family to create a symbolic reunification. Her family share photographs over great distances and generations as a way of staying connected. As family members move around, they use different technologies to maintain relationships and record their changing experiences. Chandra creates artworks in which she references and reconfigures images of her relatives providing her with an approach for exploring her own identity, in a post colonial context. She has a background in sociology, reflecting her interest on the impact of global power play which developed through colonialism and is ongoing in relation to post colonial situations. (Chandra & Empson, 2009, p103)

In *Album Pacifica 1997*, Chandra collected photographs of members of her

family. The images are placed facing inwards in their frames, so that all the viewer can see are studio stamps and hand written notes. Together the photographs form an emblematic coming together of a dispersed family.

Chandra elucidates

'While viewers are denied the actual photograph, they are able to conjure up an "imaginary" photographic landscape.....the work evokes a space in which their own histories and experiences can be imagined' - Mohini Chandra, statement, 2002 (Campany, 2003, p61)



Figure 1 Mohini Chandra, 'Album Pacifica', installation view, 1997

Chandra's relatives make themselves visible to each other through different media, but in the artist's work their images are, in a sense, invisible. She explains this feature in her work:

'...the context in which I show the work is very different to the context in which families would look at their own photographs. In many of my works I have tried to deal with this issue by 'implying' the photograph rather than actually showing it or making it explicit.'

(Chandra & Empson, 2009, p107)



Figure 2 Mohini Chandra, 'Album Pacifica', detail, 1997

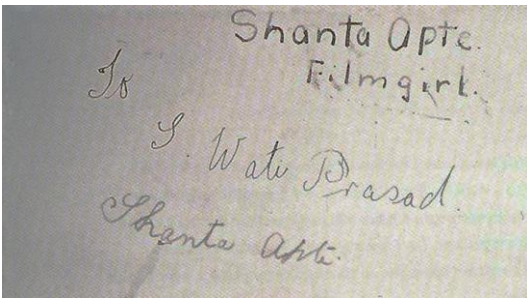


Figure 3 Mohini Chandra, 'Album Pacifica', detail, 1997

Chandra's strategy for symbolically uniting her family through an assemblage of private photos is an approach I have been interested in using to evoke the concept of mixed origins in the representation of the global family.

I have also been interested in Chandra's echoing of Barthes' notion of the family photograph's generic quality in which it lacks significance outside of the family network. While family photographs possess an emotional subjectivity, I am interested in the impartial viewer having the opportunity to encounter and reflect on cross cultural relationships.

In Chandra's *Travels in a New World 2* video installation (1997) family members discuss a remembered photograph in which they were all included many years ago. She says that both this work and *Album Pacifica, 1997* allude to the invisibility of their communities, but they also imply the ways in which photography and other media are used by people to maintain connection. (Chandra & Empson, 2009, p107)



Figure 4 Mohini Chandra, *Travels in a New World 2*, video installation, 1997

In 'Voice Over' (2002) a web-based book found on (www.diffusion.org.uk, 'Liquid Geography' series), Chandra uses sounds and photographs of an original tape that her father had made of scattered relatives around the globe speaking. The tape is a type of letter which Chandra's father took back to his parents in Fiji.

Chandra's work offers the viewer the possibility to reflect on family photo media's capacity to sustain family bonds in the course of witnessing a collective past. As well as suggesting origins and belonging, I am interested in the way family archival material can be used to evoke the notion of the 'trans-experience' in which the past, the present and diverse cultures come together.

Elinor Carucci

Carucci's approach to universalizing intimate family moments has been influential to my investigation. Her work deals with the notions of origins and belonging when photographing her dispersed family. Carucci has a particular fascination for taking photographs of her mother as she is '*my natural point of origin. My connection to the world*' (Carucci, 2002, p9) and with the passage of time the power of their relationship has not lost its significance. She says that the closeness she had felt with her mother enabled her to move away and go out into the world. It enabled her to establish other intimate relationships. For Carucci the camera was a means to both get close, and to break free. It was a testimony to her independence as well as a way of relating to the world. Photography has given her the opportunity to see her mother, father and husband in a more detached manner. (Carucci, 2002, p9)



Figure 5 Elinor Carucci, *My mother drives me in the rain*, 2000, from *Closer*, 2001 series

Carucci's technique involves a neutral, detached approach rather than the pronounced intimate, unskilled style of the family snap. The search here is for a form of photography that triggers a sense of the universality of relational

bonds and private moments in family life. There is a conscious paring down of detail. This approach keeps the symbolic and non-specific readings of the depictions of personal relationships to the fore. Through this strategy Carucci accentuates the archetypal description of personal life which for the most part is the bond between Carucci and her mother. (Cotton, 2006 p157)

In the series *Closer*, 2001 Carucci photographs her mother and family both candidly and sensuously. She is flexible about what she photographs - elements she would have previously considered to trivial become a theme in itself and because it is a detail, the universal quality of that aspect is enhanced.

“Work on minute details – a mark on the skin, a stitch, a hair, an eye, a kiss – carried the work beyond the boundaries of my family.” (Carucci, 2002, p10)



Figure 6 Elinor Carucci, *Soap*, 1996, from *Closer*, 2001 series

Carucci's easy going approach to what she photographs allows her to capture what would appear to be inconsequential. And yet images of hands holding a pair of stockings or a cake of soap become universally intimate.



Figure 7 Elinor Carucci, *Foot in Stocking*, 1997, from *Closer*, 2001 series

Her photographs are not classic family snaps and yet they evoke the closeness and familiarity of a family photograph. The soft light, warm and vibrant colour within the images enhances their intimacy.

Carucci's strategy for universalizing intimate familial moments with cropped personal and almost insignificant details - her use of ambient light and colour - are approaches I have been interested in. I have used a similar strategy to evoke in the viewer the idea of sameness and difference found in the global family's diverse environments. The idea of sameness is suggested through a photograph of bottles of nail polish nestled next to grapes on a table. This image was photographed in Melbourne. It could have been India or Japan. And yet other images suggest difference, such as a cropped image of Japanese books.

The archive as a context for belonging and origins

When families photograph themselves they are contributing to an archive. Merewether stresses that the archive is not history or memory per say, but the point from which the retelling of the past surfaces. The photograph as

archive manifests itself as a trace with the potential to fragment memory and subvert history. Memories and stories change each time the archive is revisited. (Merewether, 2006, p10) The original purpose of my family's photographs was to document the family. Today, those images have survived to afford another function. Michael Foucault compares the archive to the 'archaeology of knowledge' where the archive is recovered and reconstructed in order to learn about the past through its material remains – working out our relation to the past and the construction of a historical meaning. (Merewether, 2006, p11)

Campany writes that the rupture of the Second World War caused many European artists, such as Christian Boltanski, to examine the ways archival images interrupt the continuity of history, memory and identity – resulting in the often melancholic and enigmatic character of archival subjects in art (Campany, 2008, p21). Hal Foster argues that the 'artists-as-archivist' has moved away from the bleak interpretation of culture that views history largely in terms of the inheritance of traumatic events. Foster recognizes a divergent archival impulse taking place in contemporary art where artists have adopted a more optimistic view of the archive. Artists, such as Tacita Dean, Thomas Durant and Thomas Hirschhorn's engagement with historical material reflects the urge 'to connect with what cannot be connected' (Merewether, 2006, p145). Their 'archival impulse' is driven by an obsession with a perceived failure in cultural memory. And their motivation is driven by an idealistic desire 'to recoup failed visions in art, literature and everyday life...' (Merewether, 2006, p146)

Hal Foster's notion of the 'archival impulse' has been influential in my approach to the family archive where I aimed to evoke the notion of origins and belonging triggered by an engagement with family archival media.

Annelies Strba

Strba has been influential for her approach to her own family archive. For more than twenty years, she has photographed her immediate family and in the process, created a private family record. In her updated book *Shades of Time*, 1997; Strba interweaves her domestic images with landscape and architectural views, as well as old family photographs, to give a historical, geographical and personal context for the depiction of her family. (Cotton, 2006, p156)

Strba's images convey a sense that this family is used to and at ease with her photography of their daily lives. The tilted camera angle and image blur indicates that Strba works inconspicuously and speedily to record her family's routines and interactions. (Cotton, 2006, p156)

The fuzzy, over exposed, graininess of her images such as *Sonja und/ and Samuel - Maria*, 1996 evokes an intimacy found in family photographs – images valued for their content. Strba's photographs are a record of fleeting moments of everyday life. She has photographed her family as they eat, sleep, wash and move about their home. Strba is rarely visible in her photographs, but her presence and point of view are felt in the observations she makes. At

times this is experienced when her subjects face her and react to Strba and her camera.



Figure 8 Annelies Strba, *Sonja und/ and Samuel - Maria*, 1996

Strba's project appears to be a typical family album and yet it is not. Most family albums are made with the intention of displaying a homogeneous, chronologically arranged family history, devoid of disturbing elements. In book form, the 290 images are random. The sense of time connecting these images undulates. In place of a straightforward narrative, the viewer is given a space to consider their own private history.

Strba, for the most part, photographs her family at home. Intimate moments of affection are expressed - the sisters brush each other's hair at an early age and then again later on. The array and disarray of family life unfolds through the many photographs taken in the kitchen - birthdays are celebrated - the table is loaded with school books or table settings seen before and after a meal.



Figure 9 Annelies Strba, *in the kitchen*, 1995

In contrast the exhibition *Shades of Time* takes the form of projections from three synchronized slide carousels, in which the images are advanced every 10 seconds, accompanied by a subdued background reverberation of a drum or a heartbeat.



Figure 10 Annelies Strba, from *Shades of Time* series, 1989

The order in the exhibition series is broadly chronological so that the viewer can observe changes in Strba's family, the world around her and her photography. The viewer is offered the potential to consider how histories are constructed from fleeting moments and the role of photography in family life. (Campany, 2006, p65)

Strba's approach for working unobtrusively and speedily, and where some of the images are blurred or over exposed, harks back to my father's image making. The photographs were valued regardless of the quality of the image. The camera was always around - pictures shot in an inconspicuous manner. And in due course the archive was created. I have been influenced by Strba's use of an archival strategy to evoke a sense of belonging through common ancestral origins.

Hybridity

Chui provides a theoretical context for the representation of the global family. She discusses the notion of transexperience, a term which was developed by Chinese artist Chen Zhen for his own practice but is a term that can be generally applied to the idea of culture shifting and changing due to the influence of global resettlement. (Chui, 2007, p329)

Chui points out that the fundamental principal underlying transexperience is the idea of evolutionary change. Being in foreign environments requires an ongoing process of adapting to changing circumstances where the past influences the present. Chui writes, that Chen has described transexperience as a process of "connecting the preceding with the following" (Chui, 2007,

p330). Furthermore, Chui writes that there is an emphasis on change rather than static identity, requiring a more complex comprehension of migration or more notably 'settlement'. She argues that transexperience expresses a type of 'cultural homelessness'. The concept provides a framework to explore a wealth of experiences – a model for cultural interaction rather than an opposing relationship between East and West. It does not rely upon a simple division of here and there, or an interpretation of the dual relationship between the past and the present. Instead it describes transformation in different cultural contexts. Time, experience, and place are inherent in the notion of transexperience (Chui, 2007, p330). Chui describes it as a more fluid perception of the homeland in which it is conceived as both the past and the present – a residual and evolving influence rather than one that is fixed from the moment of migration. Transexperience takes into account the changes brought about globalization (Chui, 2007, p331).

The concept of the transexperience has been influential as it has offered a contextual frame work for the expression of the changing identity of the global family. The concept has assisted me to develop strategies to visually represent fluidity between past and the present.

Fiona Tan

Tan's work has been influential to my research with her focus on the hybrid identity of individuals in an era of globalization. Her background well positions her to comment on the complexities of culture and place as they shape identity. A 'professional foreigner' is how she describes herself – referring to her background as daughter of a Chinese father and Australian

mother. She was born in Indonesia, moved to Australia, studied in Germany and has been living in the Netherlands for more than 20 years. (Hoogervorst, foreword, 2009 *Disorient* - Fiona Tan)

Tan utilizes photo-media to produce diverse bodies of work that explore ideas about individual identity as well as its collective expression. The human subject is central to her work. Tan's practice uses a number of different photo-media that include archival or found film footage, family photographic albums, still and moving imagery. (Kent, 2006, p118)



Figure10 Fiona Tan, from *May You Live in Interesting Times*, 1997

May You Live in Interesting Time, 1997 is a one hour documentary film, made for Dutch television, in which the artist seeks to locate her identity in relation to her Chinese heritage. (Kent, 2006, p119) In this film Tan searches the Chinese Diaspora for her family members who fled Indonesia in the mid 1960s, following a violent anti communist cleanse in which thousands of

ethnic Chinese were murdered. In a voice over towards the end of the film Tan explains that she 'started this journey in search of mirrors,' but quickly confesses her 'self-definition seems an impossibility, an identity defined by what it is not'. (Nichols 2009)

In *Vox Populi, Norway, 2004* Tan uses family photographic albums in her collective portrait that is comprised of a collage of imagery volunteered by ordinary individuals across the country. The material was then edited by the artist, into a communal statement, chronicling the journey of life from birth through to adulthood, old age and death. The work traverses the individual and the universal experience of humanity (Kent, 2006, p120).



Figure 11 Fiona Tan, from *Vox Populi, Norway, 2004*

Vox Populi, Sydney, 2006, created for the 2006 Sydney Biennale, follows similar principles in its accumulation of photo-album pictures from a diverse group of people living in Sydney. Tan describes the work as 'an interaction between the poetic and documentary' (Kent, 2006, p 121). The resulting work is a melding of private and public histories resulting in another mass portrait spanning the

1960s to the present day. The work recalls Gerhard Richter's ongoing 'Atlas' series. ((Kent, 2006, P121)

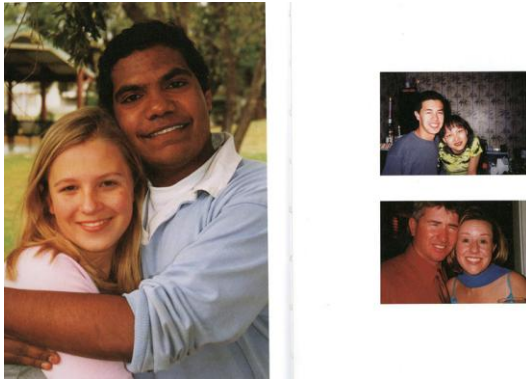


Figure 12 Fiona Tan from *Vox Populi*, Sydney, 2006

Both *Vox Populi* projects consist of the photographic display and its textual documentation with a limited edition artist's book. The idea of difference as well as sameness links the Norwegian and Australian works. The term 'global village' is appropriate here recalling both the interconnectedness between places as well as the unique characteristic of each place. The visual homogeneity of the Anglo-Saxon in the Norwegian work is in sharp contrast to the Caucasian, Australian Aboriginal, and Asian in the Sydney work - as well as the geographical differences. (Kent, 2006, p 121) The commonalities are found in the photographs that reveal the rites of passage and celebration.

In both *Vox Populi* the images are presented in clusters that drift and flow into one another creating the effect of fluid connections and meanings - offering the possibility of evoking memories for the viewer. (Kent, 2006, p 122)

I have been interested in Tan's strategy for presenting the photographic album as a collective portrait to suggest mixed origins, as well as her approach for creating links between series of works to evoke concepts of interconnectedness, transition, evolution and transformation. Finally, I have drawn on Tan's play between the poetic and the documentary to call to mind an emotional as well as intellectual response about the changing identity of the global family.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have investigated photographic media artists and theorists who have been central to the contextualization of my research project. I have examined artists who communicate their ideas through a variety of diverse photo-media: photography, archival or found film footage, family photographic albums, still and moving imagery. Carucci and Strba poetically and intimately describe family bonds. Chandra and Tan examine their own private cross cultural experiences. While I have used strategies similar to those of these artists, I have aimed to evoke the concepts of origins, belonging and hybridity as it relates to the dispersed family. Through the elegiac referencing of my family's unique archive, my work offers a private encounter with a dispersed family of Dutch origins. By enmeshing contemporary photographic portraiture and still life images of diverse environments the contemporary dispersed family is revealed, with traces of different cultures both past and present. In the end, my family's circumstances are shown as part of the universal narrative of the evolving and transforming global family.

Chapter 3: How the investigation was pursued

This chapter outlines how my investigation was pursued; it aims to reveal my journey of visual exploration into the changing identity of the global family. Throughout my research I have referenced my family's transformation from an Australia based migrant family with Dutch origins to a globally dispersed family with mixed origins. I have sought visual connections between the past and present through a poetic re-engagement with my family's photographic archives. I have made a number of field trips in Australia and overseas in order to photograph and video my family in their diverse environments. My final submission consists of four photographic and video installation works. These works are titled; *Chronicles from my Father*, *Junction: grown into me*, *Relative* and *Intersect*.

Chronicles from My Father

My family archive of old photos, super 8 film and slides has, for as long as I can remember, nurtured me with a secure knowledge of robust connection with kin. In my first body of work I knew, on an intuitive level, the archive held the key to my research and my contribution to the field. I was looking for a visual language that demonstrated the impact of globalization on the family structure and how a family stays connected when they are dislocated from one another. I wanted to draw on my family's experience as a migrant family who came to Australia in the 1950's and who had evolved into an extended multicultural family. I believed the archive was a logical resource with which to begin my research. I hoped to make some links in this work that would

create a connection with my ongoing contemporary photographic project of my current dispersed family.

My family's archive consisted of black and white photographs, colour slides and Super 8 films taken from the mid 1950s to early 1970s. In my first research project I chose to work with the old black and white photographs. I decided to set aside the slides and super 8 films for another work, not clear what that would be. The challenge for making artwork derived from the archive was to retain my sense of emotional equilibrium with the personal attachment I held for the old imagery. The photographs of my early family life were blueprinted into my psychological makeup. I had grown up looking at the photographs. In many instances my memory had been formed by the image in the photograph. In other cases, only a small section of the image was redolent of another time and the rest was hidden in my subconscious. I needed to find a way to detach from my private investment in the photos, afraid that I would fall into the trap of making self-conscious and sentimental work. I wanted to produce a body of work that struck a universal note where a cultural or collective memory was evoked for the viewer.

Initially, I was thinking of Gerhard Richter's ongoing *Atlas* series, where he juxtaposes images of public events with his personal photographs resulting in a trigger of cultural memory for the viewer.

I considered the possibility of paralleling my parent's photos with public events of the time. I spent some time looking at documentary images from the Vietnam War, the Feminist movement of the 70's and public events occurring in Australia and the world when, at the same time, my father was quietly

chronicling his young family with his box brownie camera. In the end I let go of this approach because I feared my work would become too literal.



Figure 13 Gerhardt Richter, *Newspaper & Album Photos* from ongoing Atlas series 1962-66

While I was preoccupied with the form my work would take I carried on the process of sorting, digitally scanning and printing hundreds of old black and white negatives from the late 1950 to early 1970's. In a short space of time the walls of my studio were covered in small black and white photographs. I was seeing very old images for the first time in years. My studio was alive with ghosts from the past.

One of the first things I noticed was the objects in the photographs. I thought of Roland Barthes combing through old photographs discovering in several of the photographs of his mother, objects on her dressing table such as the ivory powder box, her bed or her large bags that she had loved. The recognition of those familiar belongings in the photographs had aroused in Barthes a deep connection with his mother and the past. (Barthes, 2000, p64) I also had the

work of Christian Boltanski in mind and the way he cropped and enlarged small sections of anonymous photographs and presented them in a different context. The original meaning of the image was totally altered and in its place a powerful collective memory was ignited.

I set about cropping and enlarging segments from the photos. The fragments I chose kindled small stories in my mind. Details, such as the old radio on our kitchen bench or the curtain and window sill in our bedroom at night, triggered childhood memories. The cropped fragments I chose had an everyday ordinary quality about them such as the birthday cake and the old black and white television. I was also fascinated with hands and their gestured attitude in the image – a baby holding a toy – a woman's hand on a man's shoulder. For me, the expressive hands and familiar objects spoke of a shared communal poignancy. The images were endowed with fleeting moments expressed by any family.

I cropped and enlarged fifteen black and white images – 47.5cm x 38.5cm each and arranged them in a horizontal grid – measuring 240cm x 193cm. The birthday cake image became the central unifying piece to the work as it expressed the symbol of family photography which is the sharing of celebrations and rites of passage. The grid was an ideal format for bringing together disjointed imagery of brief and transient moments of fragmented memory.

I talked to my mother about the title of the work. This is what she sent to me in an email

Thursday, August 26, 2010 16:12

Dear Betsy

Here is my reply. I thought it over and I think "a fleeting moment" would be nice or "fleeting moments"

"een vluchtig ogenblik " or "vluchtige ogenblikken" [plural]

Memories is herinneringen

Memory is herinnering

Hope it is useful.

Anyway lots of love to you all Mama

I decided to use her email as a text piece in the presentation of my first work.

I also decided to call the work *vluchtige ogenblikken*



Figure 14 Elisabeth Redmond, *Vluchtige ogenblikken* (fleeting moments), 2010

I felt I had not finished with this first project. When I studied the photographs on my studio wall I also found whole memories from the past.

Among the photos were images of Aboriginal twin boys posing with their blonde blue eyed brother and sister. I remembered the little boys who had been adopted by their white Australian mother and German father. In other photographs I saw my golden-haired twin brother and sister holding my mother's hands.

I was reminded of Annette Kuhn and her ideas on the cultural associations offered by family photographs and of the tension created between the private moment of memory and the social moment of recalling. I asked my mother about the Aboriginal children. This is what she wrote.

As babies these twin boys came from Darwin in 1960 to live with a loving family in Shellharbour. They were adopted by an Australian woman and her German husband - Otto Nuszbaumer.

They already had two children and unable to have more. They completed their family with the twins

We got to know them very well as our children went to the same school and we also had twins the same age

We lost contact when we moved to Canberra but we remember them as very happy and carefree boys, loved by their adopted parents, brother and sister,

Love Mama

When I viewed the photographs my private memory of the twins was that yes they were loved. And I remember too it was my first experience of a cross-cultural family. With historical hindsight I now know the twins were part of the 'stolen generation'. I was struck at how they held each other's hands in sharp contrast to my brother and sister who held my mother's hands. Again, I was drawn to the gestured hands expressing nurture and love. I cropped and

enlarged two photographs of each set of twins where the hand holding was the focal point in the image.



Figure 15 Elisabeth Redmond, from series *Twins*, 1963, 2010



Figure 16 Elisabeth Redmond, from series *Twins*, 1963, 2010

Dressed in their matching sailor suits the Aboriginal boys possessed a disturbing similarity to cute little dolls. I decided to crop a photograph which had a black and white doll sitting in the background of the image. When I juxtaposed the detail with the boys it seemed to highlight the unnerving effect of the boys in their outfits.

I felt it was important to incorporate my mother's emails as text pieces because her words added a further stimulus in generating cultural memory. In the end there are six large images -76cm x 80cm or 76cm x 76cm. I greatly

enlarged the cropped images, so that the twins appeared more life like to evoke for the viewer origins and belonging in Australian cultural history. I called this second group of pictures *Twins, 1963*.

I presented both '*vluchtige ogenblikken*' and *Twins, 1963* at 1Entrepot Gallery calling the exhibition *Chronicles from My Father*. After all, it was my father who had taken the original photographs. He used a simple box brownie camera with which he made beautifully considered images. He had to be economical when shooting because film and prints were expensive. I wanted to honour his process by using film and my Hasselblad camera when I embarked on my photographic field trips in search of my contemporary, scattered family.

In summary, the central idea for *Chronicles from my Father*, familial belonging evidenced through family photographs, is evoked by cropping and enlarging my family's archival photographs. The aim of the approach was to universalize images of celebration and rites of passage – moments expressed in all family photographs. I knew the strategy of cropped details of domesticity would create a connection with my ongoing contemporary photographic project of my current dispersed family. *Twins, 1963* revealed that historically, a homogenous shared origin offered a sense of belonging while mixed origins held a more menacing perspective. This last work also provided a link to my research on the contemporary cross-cultural family.

1. Entrepot is a student Gallery at the Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania

Junction: grown into me

When I showed *Chronicles from my Father* at Entrepot gallery I knew I had not finished with the archive. I still had the old super8 films and boxes of slides to sort through. I thought about what my mother had said when I asked her what had prompted her and my father to make home movies in the first place. She said that she had felt compelled to make and send the home movies to Holland so that her mother could see and know her young family in Australia more intimately. When my mother left Holland in 1954 she never saw my grandmother again. It had been a terrible grief for both of them. The home movies were a way of reassuring my grandmother that my mother was thriving in her new homeland. And so there was a constant exchange of movies as well as slides and photographs between Australia and Holland.

I thought of Sontag's writing of the disappearing extended family and how the photograph had taken on the symbolic presence of scattered relatives. I wanted to make a work that would visually describe how families stayed in touch through the sharing of photographic media. I returned to the old family slides and super 8 films with the idea of using them for my second research project.

I began with the old home movie. In the 1990s my parents had the film professionally transferred onto video. And since that time the original film was thought to be lost. I had an hour's worth of footage on videotape – the scenes were in chronological disarray and in some sections, the tape had deteriorated to such an extent that certain stills were barely visible. I set about transposing the video onto disc.

The home movie footage was now in a format where I could begin the process of editing with the Final Cut Pro program. As I was arranging, rearranging and deleting slices of chromatic history, guided by film and sound editor Walter Murch's insights into film editing: the emotion evoked, advancing the story, finding the right rhythm, acknowledgement of audience focal interest, (Murch, 1992, p23). I had the film down to nineteen minutes and then twelve and finally six minutes and sixty seconds. I knew I had to make the film as short as possible to capture and maintain an audience's interest in a gallery setting. Some of the subjects I sought to portray included moments of domestic harmony, the arrival of newborn babies, birthday party celebrations as well as scenes of the natural environment, weather and water from an Australian perspective. I was trying to imagine the things my grandmother would have found heartening – aspects of our lives that would help her feel connected to her faraway family, giving her a sense of her daughter's new environment and our rites of passage and family celebration. My grandmother would have seen that her daughter had friends and went on picnics with them. I was reminded of Walter Benjamin's notion of 'unconscious optics' the invisible network of visual detail in relation to the family and the family picture (Hirsch, M, 1997, p10). If my grandmother looked closely she would have received insight into her grandchildren. I imagine she would have been aware of the frustration in her granddaughter's face while she is knitting or another granddaughter's sulking expression because she is not able to hold one of the babies. I think she would also have seen the weary look on my mother's face while she is nursing her new born twins and noticed the iconic Australian hills hoist billowing with nappies. And she would have enjoyed

seeing the sheer joy displayed by her grandchildren while running around with a streaming hose in the backyard on a hot summer's day.



Figure 17 Elisabeth Redmond, still from installation *Junction: grown into me*, 2011

When I felt I had completed the editing of the home movie I worked on the sound. Initially, I played with the idea of using music from Beethoven. I was thinking the classical music may create an atmosphere of foreigners in a new frontier. When I tried this, the video took on a sorrowful and sentimental undertone. I also realized that finding any suitable music for the video would be fraught with copy write issues. I then had the idea of using my mother's voice. Her Dutch accent and unassuming story telling style would give the video a much more authentic tone.

I prepared a list of questions relating to the edited home movie. I set up the sound system from my video player and I phoned her in Canberra. Some of the questions I put to her included: what were her first impressions of the Australian landscape? Did she remember the birthday party scene, and how

did she feel about caring for five children under the age of six? My mother's replies in our telephone conversation became the backdrop to the film. I decided to leave the sound of the telephone ringing in the opening scene with the train moving through the Australian landscape. The effect of the ringing accentuated the notion of distance and dispersal, themes that emerged with particular strength in this work.

At the same time I was working on the home movie I was also trawling through hundreds of Australian and Dutch slides. During the 1970s families were captivated with documenting their lives on those small colour transparencies. The click of the carousel on family slide nights was a familiar sound for many families. Both my family in Australia and extended family in Holland embraced the custom with great gusto.

I knew my project was going to be about the international exchange of imagery. I abandoned the Australian slides and decided to concentrate on the Dutch imagery. As a child I remembered how much my family loved receiving parcels of slides in the mail. I sought out the images that I believed gave us a sense of connection with kin we had never physically met. As with the film stills I chose images expressing rites of passage and family celebration. I was also seduced by depictions of Dutch interiors with still life decoration, flowers and indoor plants and exteriors revealing frosty landscapes and European seasonal change. I was very much drawn to images of relatives where they seemed unaware of the camera. For me they were the candid moments that gave me a possible insight into my kinfolk. I decided I would present these images as a very slow digital slide show in a 1970's style frame.



Figure 18 Elisabeth Redmond, from installation *Junction: grown into me*, 2011

In 2011 I had the opportunity to present my current project in an exhibition called *An Archival Impulse* curated by Dr Brigita Ozolins and Dr Ruth Frost at the 2. Plimsoll Gallery. I also had a role as an assistant to the curators. The title of the show was taken from the title of Hal Foster's essay of the same name. All the artists in the exhibition referenced the archive or archival strategies within their diverse practices.

For the show, I recreated a section of my childhood living room based on my memories and imaginings of the real living room in which I grew up. I was interested in creating a room that spoke of a bygone era and that also conveyed cross-cultural influences. Most of the pieces in the room were from my childhood. The red leather couch was my mother's dream couch acquired after I left home. I did not grow up with the couch - I grew up with the dream of it. However, the tapestry with the image of the sewing circle of women was brought in a trunk from Holland. I also displayed another two small Dutch artefacts, 'delft blue' ceramic plates with images of Rembrandt and Vermeer's

2. The Plimsoll Gallery is the University of Tasmania's showcase gallery

The girl with the pearl earring, as well as an old trunk left over from World War 11. An Albert Namatjira image was on display. There was a time where his prints adorned many Australian homes including ours. Lastly, an indoor plant – a Dutch household is not complete without them.



Figure 19 Elisabeth Redmond, installation *Junction: grown into me*, 2011

In the room I presented the edited home movie on an old fashioned portable, white movie screen. Simultaneously, the Dutch slides were shifting slowly in a 1970s encased digital frame. I was looking to create a room where there was a dialogue of family life between two different countries. The room became a junction. The Collins dictionary defines *junction* as– *n a place where several routes, lines, or roads meet, link, or cross each other: a railway junction* (Collins dictionary 2007) And when my mother talked of the difficulty of coming to terms with the Australian landscape, she finally describes the process as having ‘grown into me’ - hence the title of the work.

When *Junction: grown into me* was installed in the Plimsoll Gallery I was thinking of how it could connect with my more contemporary work. I decided

I wanted to visually represent my siblings re-engaging with our old family archive. *Junction: grown into me* sowed a seed for a contemporary video showing my siblings' watching shared imagery from the past. The old home movie and Dutch slides continues to provide us with a sense of belonging and origins. It connects us because it is a past we have shared. At the same time I knew I wanted my contemporary video to reveal the influence of globalization on my family and that this is a widespread conundrum.

In conclusion, the central idea in *Junction*, belonging through kinship, is evoked with an old home movie of my family in Australia and slides of our extended family in Holland running simultaneously, in a recreated living room. The discourse, created through photo-media, reveals the symbolic unification of a family dispersed across two countries. This series has been important to my investigation because it demonstrates photographic imagery offering a real sense of belonging through evidence of shared cultural and ancestral origins. At the same time, however, there is a cross cultural dialogue going on with the exchange of imagery that is specific to a particular country.

Relative

The idea for this project pertains to the concept of trans- experience, the process of “connecting the preceding with the following” (Chui, 2007, p330). My plan was to draw on the conceptual and formal links developed in the two previous series of work as a way of implying fluidity between past and present and, in the process, to reveal the evolutionary changes on the dispersed family. The focus for this project is the representation of the contemporary

dispersed family drawing on my family experience as a reference point. The definition of the concepts of origins and belonging had shifted for my family due to global influences. We had evolved from a family with Dutch origins into an extended family with mixed origins.

During the 1960s and 1970s my family lived on the south coast of New South Wales and our extended kin lived in the Netherlands. We have continued to be a dispersed family. Now, however, my mother, sister and nephew live in Canberra - my father died in 1995. Another sister, who is a single parent with three daughters and one granddaughter, lives in Melbourne. My brother lives in Japan with his Japanese wife and my youngest sister lives in India with her Indian husband and their three children. I live in Hobart with my Australian partner who has Irish origins. During the course of this project our eldest son moved to Singapore with his Chinese wife who has since given birth to a baby girl. In order to create my third series, *Relative* I traveled in Australia and to India, Japan and Singapore to photograph and video my multicultural family in their diverse environments. As with the previous series of works I was again confronted with the problem of my subjective attachment to this project and the trap of making work that could be literal and indulgent. I wanted to find an approach to the investigation that would convey my family situation from a universal perspective, that of the changing identity of the global family.

Elinor Carucci's technique of universalizing personal images through conscious paring down of detail came to mind. I wanted my images to convey a timeless, nonspecific quality. I also wanted the work to visually connect with

Chronicles from My Father – conceptually linking the past with the present. In the *Chronicles* series I was drawn to images of the gestured hands and cropped details of domestic items: the window sill, the radio on the kitchen bench, a plastic shopping bag.

The Oxford dictionary defines relative as a person connected by blood or marriage. Philosophically relative is also defined as a concept which is dependent on something else. (Oxford Dictionary of English 2010) The word ‘relative’ seemed to be an apt title for this investigation because this series is both about the extended family as well as having linkages to *Chronicles from my Father*. In the course of developing this work I decided I would honor my father’s carefully considered photographs, made with his box brownie camera, by using my 1959 Hasselblad camera. However, to give the work a contemporary context I chose colour over black and white which is redolent of an earlier time. Nevertheless, the analogue process offered me the same kinds of constraints my father faced when photographing his young family. Film was, and still is expensive, requiring care and economy of shots. In photographing my family and their surroundings I thought of the casual snap shot as a device for expressing family intimacy. My approach was to work with soft natural light, close cropping and shallow depth of field. The warm and vibrant colour within the images enhanced their intimacy. Another strategy was to imbue the contemporary photographs with the spirit of that earlier time through the utilization of the still life approach.

During the course of exchange of photographs between the families in

Australia and Holland we also traded depictions of our homes. *Junction: grown into me* reveals photographs sent to us of interiors absent of human presence and images of objects displayed in considered assemblages – several old clocks decorating a mantel piece or clusters of framed family photographs resting on an old table, or just vases of carefully arranged flowers. Holland has a rich tradition of still life from which my family embraced for their own image making. Those early still life descriptions we received from the motherland had a strong bearing on our perception of our origins. The spaces we create and occupy are very telling. Those things we surround ourselves with – objects that hold our stories and memories - speak of who we are.

During my travels, as I photographed my family in their different locations, I also found myself drawn to their spaces and their surrounding paraphernalia. I photographed bowls of rambutans and dragon fruit, caressed by an ambient light, resting on an Ikea sideboard in my son's home in Singapore. White thongs adjacent to plastic ultra-marine blue buckets used for bathing, spoke of my sister's daily life in Pune. A bowl of green grapes nestled with bottles of pink and red nail polish on a wooden coffee table summed up my afternoon with my nieces in Melbourne. It also sparked the image of my Indian family connection with my niece who loves to paint her nails blue. Delicate teacups echoed the sharing of green tea in Japan with my brother and sister-in-law. I was finding a visual language that communicated the circumstance of my global family.



Figure 20 Elisabeth Redmond, untitled colour photograph from *Relative* series, 2012

I was interested in the notion of the metaphorical and narrative potential of household objects when they are represented pictorially. With this in mind, and for a number of reasons, I sought to reference the tradition of 17th century Dutch still life painting in my photography. Firstly, I perceived still life as a device for connecting the work with my Dutch ancestral roots. Secondly, I sought the contemporary still life as an approach for endowing a visual link with the domestic imagery in *Chronicles with My Father* and *Junction: grown into me*, arousing a conversation between the past and the present. Thirdly, as I traveled through Asia and Australia I found my family's domestic set ups were heavily influenced by the different cultures in which they found themselves. The objects and the way in which they were arranged in their private spaces spoke to me of the concept of cross-cultural influence and hybridity such as the rambutans on an Ikea side board or my brother's bookcase filled with both Japanese and English titled books. And yet at the same time there were similarities in those environments which conjured a

sense of filial connection. Our bookcases often contained some of the same books or vases of tulips evoking our common origins.



Figure 21 Elisabeth Redmond, untitled colour photograph from *Relative* series, 2012

It occurred to me if I displayed the domestic images in variable dimensions, in an interwoven manner, that this strategy had the potential to offer a symbolic coming together of diverse cultures, past and present.



Figure 22 Elisabeth Redmond, work in progress from *Relative* series, 2012

At the same time I was photographing the diverse surroundings in which my family lived, I was also capturing their photographic portraits. When I viewed those images of my multicultural clan I thought of Barthes' description of the generic family photograph. Although the images of my family evoked a private meaning for me, an impartial viewer's perception of those photographs would be altogether different. I thought of Tan's *Vox Populi* series with the family photographic albums presented as a collective portrait and communal statement chronicling the passage of life. I was interested in providing the viewer with clues to indicate that this cluster of images was a gathering together of a global family with mixed origins.



Figure 23 Elisabeth Redmond, untitled colour photograph from *Album in Relative* series, 2012

The first hint I provided was by juxtaposing the group portraits with the contemporary, interspersed domestic photographs displayed on the adjacent wall. I was also thinking of *Junction: grown into me* with the lounge room setting for families to come together for the viewing of home movies and slides. For the second sign, I wanted to create a similar intimacy for this

current series within a more contemporary setting. Small portraits in white frames of variable sizes arranged on and around a globally iconic Ikea shelf imply a contemporary domestic wall display of family photographs, the scatter hang suggesting dispersion. The last clue was in the title of the work. I decided to call the work *Album* so that the viewer would understand that this is a family symbolically assembled together. Although this piece has a separate title it is, nevertheless, part of the *Relative* series.



Figure 24 Elisabeth Redmond, work in progress from *Album* in *Relative* series, 2012

In conclusion, the central theme in *Relative* is the contemporary cross-cultural global family which has evolved with traces of diverse cultures, both past and present. These ideas are evoked through the presentation of entwined contemporary photographs of my family and their diverse surroundings. This series has been significant to the project in terms of referencing the tradition of 17th century Dutch still life painting. The use of this device relates the photographic imagery to my Dutch ancestral origins and provides a visual link

with the domestic imagery in *Chronicles with My Father*. The employment of this strategy suggests a dialogue between past and present. The domestic set ups of my globally dispersed family are influenced by the different cultures in which they live. The objects and the way in which they are arranged in their private spaces evoke difference and sameness – bringing to mind cross-cultural influence and hybridity.

Intersect

In this final work I was interested in evoking the three underpinning concepts of the project; origins, belonging and hybridity, through video. The central idea for this project was to create a symbolic re-unification of our dispersed family through the experience of recalling our mutually, shared past. I was thinking of Chandra's *Travels in a New World 2* video installation (1997) in which family members discuss a remembered photograph that they were all included in many years ago.

I wanted to create linkages with *Junction: grown into me* by returning to the old super 8 film. I filmed each of my siblings watching our old home movie amongst the backdrop of their different surroundings. As in *Relative* I was looking to convey the idea of the trans-experience - the coming together of the past and the present and its relationship to the globally dispersed family.

After travelling and collecting fourteen hours of video footage I set about the editing process using the Final Cut Pro program. As in the previous works I was apprehensive about the subjective nature of the material. I was interested

in evoking a space in which the viewer had the opportunity to imagine their own personal shared histories and experiences with family.

I made a small inventory of elements I wanted incorporated into the video. It included melding the super 8 film with the contemporary video as a way of bringing the past and present together. Other features to be included in the video were scenes of airports, train stations and traffic with the idea of conveying the geographical distance between us. I also wanted to communicate our diverse locations as well as the possible similarities in our different surroundings. Another feature I wanted to incorporate in the video was my sibling's verbal reflections of our home movie. In terms of background sound, I was interested in using the location sounds of the different environments. Lastly, I was open to the discoveries along the way of the editing process, which would without a doubt affect the final outcome of the film.

Steps in the editing process

I had collected 14 hours of film footage which I edited to twelve minutes and finally, to six minute and six seconds. I divided the film into four parts with four different locations - India, Melbourne, Japan and Canberra.

I worked on a similar format for each of the parts so that there was common links between the different sites. Each part opens with a location shot of the particular place my siblings live. I use a traffic scene to create a sense of place – whether it is Flinders Street Station, Tokyo railway station, Canberra airport or a scene of people getting of a bus in my sister's street in India.



Figure 25 Elisabeth Redmond, still from video *Intersect*, 2012



Figure 26 Elisabeth Redmond, still from video *Intersect*, 2012

The next linking scene is an outdoor scene of their homes followed by a scene in their kitchens. In India my sister's home help/friend, Menasha, is washing the dishes - in Melbourne my sister's daughter, Odette, is cutting up an apple - in Japan my brother's wife, Rie, is preparing a meal, and in Canberra my sister's cat is grooming himself on the kitchen bench.

The video then moves onto a long shot of my siblings watching the home movie on a television screen – after which the film moves between close-ups of my siblings and scenes from the super 8 film. Each part ends with an image of a white curtain fading away to the sound of the next country's transport scene.



Figure 27 Elisabeth Redmond, still from video *Intersect*, 2012



Figure 28 Elisabeth Redmond, still from video *Intersect*, 2012

At the same time I was editing the contemporary video of my siblings, I was re-editing the super 8 film. I decided to incorporate the same scene of us running around in the backyard with the hose, into all four parts of the video. It was a joyous scene in which we were all present and was an anchor for our collective past. Other common scenes were images of my father and my mother who provided us with our common shared origins. Each part of the video also showed individual close ups of my siblings as infants juxtaposed with a close-up of them as they are now. I also incorporated separate stand alone scenes from the super 8 film in each part of the film – so that the video presentation would not appear too formulaic.



Figure 29 Elisabeth Redmond, still from video *Intersect*, 2012



Figure 30 Elisabeth Redmond, still from video *Intersect*, 2012



Figure 31 Elisabeth Redmond, still from video *Intersect*, 2012

What I discovered along the way

When I began working on the sound, I realized I no longer wanted to use my sibling's commentary. The film was more poetic with their silence. The viewer had more scope for interpretation through the nuances of facial expressions of my siblings as they responded to the home movie.

I was reminded of Carucci who spoke of her mother as '*my natural point of origin. My connection to the world*' (Carucci, 2002, p9). And of course my mother was our shared point of origin. I decided to use her voice again for the background sound – providing at the same time another link with *Junction: grow into me*. I wanted her voice to be clear and interspersed with the natural sounds of my sibling's environments. In India it was the hum of background traffic, in Melbourne it was the quiet suburban sound of birds and the occasional car, in Japan it was the sound of calm activity in the kitchen and in Canberra a clock ticking.

My mother anchored the separate parts of the video with her discussion of migration - of how her language had evolved into a hybridized English/Dutch tongue - the beautiful Australian beaches - my father - and finishing with the garden hose scene.

The Collins dictionary defines 'intersect' as the point where lines cross each other, such as a road junction. (Collins dictionary, 2007) This video represented another junction – a meeting point where my siblings are brought together through our mutual past evidenced through the home movie.

In summary, the central theme of *Intersect*, familial belonging through a mutually shared history, is evoked through a contemporary video enmeshed with an old home movie. My siblings are filmed in their different locations around Asia and Australia watching our home movie. They engage with our collective past. The work focuses on the past, the present and a coming together of diverse cultures. This series reveals a dispersed family's sense of belonging through archival imagery resonant of their shared origins and who have now transitioned and evolved into a family with mixed origins.

Conclusion

This investigation has resulted in four photo media works:

1. *Chronicles of my father*, a poetic re interpretation of family archival photographs;
2. *Junction: grown into me*, an installation of a recreated living room from the 1970s incorporated with more archival still and moving images;
3. *Relative*, an installation of interwoven contemporary photographs and;
4. *Intersect* a video screening of siblings, in diverse backgrounds, watching an old home movie.

These works are a culmination of the exploration of the concepts surrounding the changing identity of the global family. The project has drawn on my family's transformation from a dispersed family with Dutch origins into a global family with mixed origins. The investigation has been expressed

through the re-engagement of my family archive where I have sought to find connections between the past and present. Contemporary photographs and video, taken from my field trips through Australia and Asia, are presented to convey a global family with traces of diverse cultures, both past and present. Together, all four works articulate the universal narrative of the evolution and transformation of the global family.

Conclusion

The aim of this project has been to use photo-media to visualize the contemporary dispersed family, a family that is physically separated and yet emotionally connected. The research has been based on my family's experience as an Australian postwar migrant family with Dutch origins that has evolved into a contemporary global family with connections to India, Japan, Singapore and Australia. I have developed a visual language that aims to evoke the unification of this family and, more broadly, the transition and transformation of the family as a result of global influences.

The project's conceptual underpinning - origins, belonging and hybridity - have been developed through an exploration of how a family's photo-media sustains familial connection. Susan Sontag, in particular, has provided a strong framework both conceptually and formally with her discussion of the photograph's power to symbolically reunite the dispersed family. Melissa Chui's thoughts on 'trans-experience' - the idea of the past informing the present within the context of a globalised world - has also been particularly significant for the development of the work.

The project has aimed to contribute to a field of contemporary photo media that is concerned with exploring family life. It has engaged with artists who communicate their ideas through a variety of diverse photo-media: photography, archival or found film footage, family photographic albums, still and moving imagery. The work of Elinor Carucci, Annelies Strba, Mohini Chandra and Fiona Tan demonstrates a wide range of strategies for describing

familial interaction and private cross-cultural experiences inside a global framework. Carucci's strategy of close cropped photographs of intimate and domestic details expresses her mother as her 'natural point of origin' for her dispersed family (Carucci, 2002, p9). Strba's use of an archival strategy evokes a sense of belonging through common ancestral origins. Chandra's uses photographs of her globally dispersed Fijian Indian family to create a symbolic reunification. And Tan's practice uses a number of strategies that include archival or found film footage, family photographic albums, still and moving imagery to explores ideas about individual identity as well as its collective expression from a cross cultural perspective. Within this context, my research offers an intimate engagement with my family of Dutch origins that has evolved into a global family with mixed origins. The project conveys the story of the dispersed family who are symbolically reconnected through photo-media. It has investigated strategies for conveying those ideas through the poetic referencing of a unique family archive, contemporary photographs and video of a modern dispersed family.

This project has contributed to our understanding of familial connections through the exploration of four different themes, relating to the contemporary global family, realized in four installations.

In both *Chronicles from my Father* and *Junction: grown into me*, the underpinning concepts of origins, belonging and hybridity are evoked through the use of personal photographs and film footage from my family's archive. Through the poetic referencing of a unique family archive, the project has offered an insight into a dispersed family with Dutch origins. At

the same time the viewer has been given an opening for a potential re-engagement with Australian cultural history.

In *Chronicles from my Father*, the central theme has been familial bonds evidenced through family photographs. In the first series, *vluchtige ogenblikken* (*fleeting moments*), universal moments of celebration and domesticity are described through old photographs. The cropped images of details of domestic harmony set up a link to contemporary photographs of my family in *Relative* in their current diverse surroundings. In the second series, *Twins, 1963*, images of my blond three year old twin brother and sister holding my mother's hands have been juxtaposed with images of Aboriginal twin boys of the same age holding each other's hands. This series conveyed the notion that historically, homogenous shared origins provided a sense of belonging while mixed origins contained a more challenging and complex viewpoint on familial security.

The central idea in *Junction: grown into me* is the symbolic unification of a dispersed family through photo-media. Photographs from Holland and a home movie made in Australia have been displayed simultaneously in a recreated 1970s living room. The dialogue between the two countries related the notion of belonging through a family's shared cultural and ancestral origins evidenced through photo-media. As in *Chronicles from my Father*, this series facilitated the potential to discover comparisons between the past and present. The exchanged images offer an insight into an Australian and

Dutch culture and suggest a cross-cultural dialogue between families with homogenous origins.

In *Relative and Intersect*, the underpinning concept of hybridity has been evoked through contemporary photography and video. Both works offer the viewer the opportunity to engage with a modern globally dispersed family which has transitioned and evolved, retaining traces of diverse cultures, the past and the present.

In Relative, the notion of mixed origins has been expressed through two separate and inter-related presentations of contemporary photographs. The first, *Album*, an installation of portraits of my cross-cultural global family, conveys our symbolic coming together. The adjacent group of photographs, *Relative*, are an intertwined series of images of still life and interiors taken from the diverse environments in which my family live. The use of the contemporary still life process has evoked a dialogue between the past and present. Dutch origins are suggested through reference to 17th century Dutch still life painting and also create a link with the domestic imagery in *Chronicles from My Father*. Furthermore, the domestic set ups of my globally dispersed family have been heavily influenced by the different cultures in which they live. The objects and the way in which they have been arranged in their private spaces reflected cross cultural influence and hybridity.

In *Intersect*, the central idea - familial connectedness through a shared history - has been evoked through a contemporary video taken in the different

environments in which my siblings engage with our old home movie. The video is enmeshed with the super 8 film and close ups of my family. The work is resonant of the concept of trans-experience, where the past, the present and diverse cultures come together.

Family Album has offered an intimate engagement with my family's story, a family with Dutch origins who has evolved into a global family with mixed origins. The project conveys the experience of the dispersed family who are symbolically brought together through photo-media. The project has shown that through a range of strategies: the poetic re-interpretation of family archival still and moving image; the use of entwined contemporary photographs of a cross-cultural family and their different surroundings, and the incorporation of a contemporary video screening of siblings, in diverse backgrounds, watching their old home movie, the changing identity of the dispersed family can be powerfully evoked. It concludes that the universal phenomenon of the evolution, transformation and connectedness of the global family is ongoing.

Appendices

Appendix I: Bibliography

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Appendix II: List of Illustrations

Figure 1

Mohini Chandra, '*Album Pacifica*', installation view, 1997
Framed reverse photographs with inscriptions, dimensions variable
Sourced from <www.iniva.org/dare/themes/space/Chandra>, (accessed 10 September 2012)

Figure 2

Mohini Chandra, '*Album Pacifica*', detail, 1997
Photograph, dimension unknown,
Scanned from Campany, D 2003, *Art and Photography*, Phaidon Press Ltd, London

Figure 3

Mohini Chandra, '*Album Pacifica*', detail, 1997
Framed reverse photograph, inscription, dimensions variable
Scanned from Campany, D 2003, *Art and Photography*, Phaidon Press Ltd, London

Figure 4

Mohini Chandra, '*Travels in a New World 2*', video installation, 1997
Still from video
Sourced from <www.iniva.org/dare/themes/space/Chandra> (accessed 14 October 2012)

Figure 5

Elinor Carucci, *My mother drives me in the rain*, 2000

Colour photograph, dimension unknown
Scanned from Carucci, E 2002, *Closer, Photographs by Elinor Carucci*, Chronicle Books, San Francisco

Figure 6

Elinor Carucci, *Soap*, 1996
Colour photograph, dimension unknown
Scanned from Carucci, E 2002, *Closer, Photographs by Elinor Carucci, G*, Chronicle Books, San Francisco

Figure 7

Elinor Carucci, *Foot in Stocking*, 1997
Colour photograph, dimension unknown
Scanned from Carucci, E 2002, *Closer, Photographs by Elinor Carucci, G*, Chronicle Books, San Francisco

Figure 8

Annelies Strba, *Sonja und/ and Samuel - Maria*, 1996
Colour photograph, dimension unknown
Scanned from Strba, A 1997, *Shades of Time*, Lars Muller Publishers, Italy

Figure 9

Annelies Strba, *in the kitchen*, 1995
Colour photograph, dimension unknown
Scanned from Strba, A 1997, *Shades of Time*, Lars Muller Publishers, Italy

Figure 10

Annelies Strba, from *Shades of Time* series, 1989
Colour and black and white photographs, dimensions unknown
Scanned from Campany, D 2003, *Art and Photography*, Phaidon Press Ltd,
London

Figure 10

Fiona Tan, from *May You Live in Interesting Times*, 1997
Still from film
Sourced from 'Art Book', <<http://www.artbook.com/catalog-art-monographs-tan-fiona.html>> (accessed 15 September 2012)

Figure 11

Fiona Tan, from *Vox Populi, Norway*, 2004
Colour photograph, dimension unknown
Sourced from 'Book works', <<http://bookworks.org.uk/node/120>> (accessed 15 September 2012)

Figure 12

Fiona Tan from *Vox Populi, Sydney*, 2006
Colour photographs, dimension unknown
Scanned from: Tan, F 2006, *Fiona Tan: Vox Populi*>>>Sydney, Book Works in
assoc with Biennale of Sydney, London

Figure13

Gerhardt Richter, from ongoing *Atlas* series, 1962-66
Black and white photographs and newspaper clippings
Scanned from Richter: G 2006 *Atlas*, D.A.P/Distributed Art Publishers New
York

Figure 14

Elisabeth Redmond, *Vluchtige ogenblikken (fleeting moments)*, 2010

Black and white photographs, digitally manipulated, 240cm x 193cm

Figure 15

Elisabeth Redmond, from series *Twins*, 1963, 2010

Black and white photographs, digitally manipulated, each 76cm x 80cm

Figure 16

Elisabeth Redmond, from series *Twins*, 1963, 2010

Black and white photographs, digitally manipulated, dimensions variable

Figure 17

Elisabeth Redmond, from installation *Junction: grown into me*, 2011

Still from video

Figure 18

Elisabeth Redmond, from installation *Junction: grown into me*, 2011

Digital image converted from colour slide

Figure 19

Elisabeth Redmond, installation *Junction: grown into me*, 2011

Figure 20

Elisabeth Redmond, untitled colour photograph from *Relative* series, 2012

Dimensions 49cm x 49cm

Figure 21

Elisabeth Redmond, untitled colour photograph from *Relative* series, 2012

Dimensions 49cm x 49cm

Figure 22

Elisabeth Redmond, work in progress from *Relative* series, 2012

Figure 23

Elisabeth Redmond, untitled colour photograph in *Album* from *Relative* series, 2012

Dimensions 17.5cm x 17.5cm

Figure 24

Elisabeth Redmond, work in progress in *Album* from *Relative* series, 2012

Figure 25

Elisabeth Redmond, still from video *Intersect*, 2012

Figure 26

Elisabeth Redmond, still from video *Intersect*, 2012

Figure 27

Elisabeth Redmond, still from video *Intersect*, 2012

Figure 28

Elisabeth Redmond, still from video *Intersect*, 2012

Figure 29

Elisabeth Redmond, video still from *Intersect*, 2012

Figure 30

Elisabeth Redmond, video still from *Intersect*, 2012

Figure 31

Elisabeth Redmond, still from video *Intersect*, 2012

